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ABSTRACT

In the framework of Transactional Analysis, there are three ego states, the Parent, Child, and Adult. Students' enthusiasm for learning is directly related to the health of their Child ego state. Since the Adult ego state exemplifies the rational part, schools can be seen as organized to further the functioning of this state. An examination of courses of study, curriculum guides, teacher's editions of textbooks, and actual classroom activities reveals an urgency to get students to act consistently in the Adult state, where they examine data, make comparisons, infer relationships, and draw conclusions in order to solve problems. However, language learning can be more effective when the Adult ego state functions in service of the Child. In this way, students' curiosity, spontaneity, and creativity are channelled into making learning exciting and enjoyable. Activity sequences should be chosen to foster creative investigation and expression, and should culminate in composing experiences based on first-hand activities in collection of data. (Several activities are included.) (Author/DF)

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FREEING THE 'CHILD' FOR CREATIVE LANGUAGE USE

Anne M. Werdman
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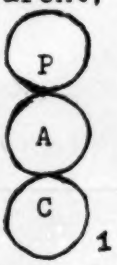
The theory of Transactional Analysis (TA) provides a useful framework for considering the role of creativity in learning. Our basic philosophy is that people learn best when they are enjoying it and, possibly, having fun. Enjoyment and the freedom to have fun come from our Child ego state, as developed by Eric Berne in his writings and teachings regarding Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1961).

In the title of this article the Child we are referring to is the Child ego state. Transactional Analysis deals with the three ego states of Parent, Adult, and Child.



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According to Berne, everyone has these three ego states. One of the basic goals of TA is to determine which ego state is in the executive when a person chooses to act or transact. Another goal is to get the Adult to work in service of the Child ego state. This article focuses on the latter goal.

Summarily, the Parent ego state is all <u>authority</u> within the individual: the do's and don'ts, the judging and the caring. The Parent is nurturing and/or judgmental (critical), biased and prejudiced.

The Adult is the <u>computer</u>. It deals with facts and gives answers to the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions we all have. It analyzes information in the here and now.

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The Child ego state provides the storehouse for our feelings - emotions. All creativity, all curiosity, all spontaneity are in the Child ego state. That is why we are concerned about getting the Adult in service of the Child.

The love, the hate, the impulse, the spontaneous, the play, the WOW! experiences and the fears are all in the natural Child. When we are creative or imaginative our intuitive Child or our little professor is turned on. Another aspect of the Child comes on when we are fearful, guilty, or ashamed: the adapted Child. (In TA the natural Child is a Prince or a Princess--the adapted Child is a Frog).

2

(Nurturing)
(Critical)
(Natural)
(Adapted)

Each ego state is necessary to have and use. When the use of one begins to incapacitate the use of the others, some attention should be given to one's transactions. One thing that is happening in such a situation is contamination, i.e. one ego state has moved into the arena of the other. It looks like this:

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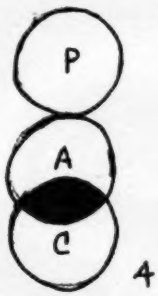

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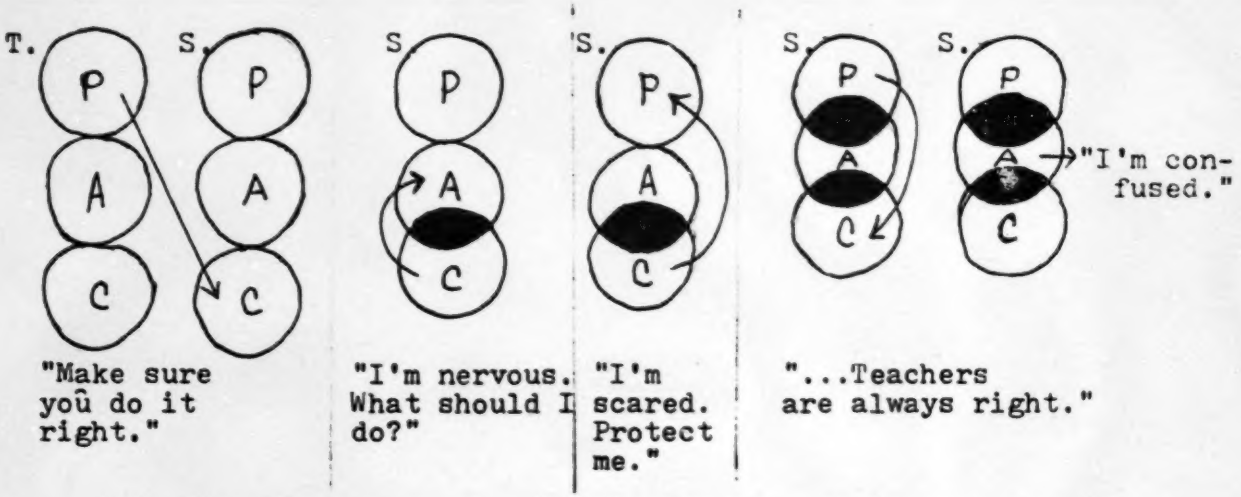
In diagram three, the Parent ego state is contaminating the Adult--biases and prejudices are blocking clear thinking. The Adult is operating without checking out all of the facts. In diagram four, the Child ego state, with its delusions, is contaminating the Adult. Once again, the Adult does not have all the necessary information. It cannot properly act in service of the Child.

More serious situations may come about when the Parent and the Child contaminate the Adult at the same time:

5

A quick glance at diagram five shows that the Adult has just about been all "used up"--there is not much left to "compute" and to service the Child. Sometimes that is what happens in the classroom or learning situation.

The authoritarian teacher will give the rules, the restrictions, the only way of doing a certain thing. These instructions are received by the Child ego state of the student, who may become nervous and/or scared--thus confusing the student's Adult ego state. The scared or nervous Child contacts its Parent ego state for help. If that Parent ego says something like: "You better listen to the teacher. Teachers are always right." the student has a bigger problem. Now the Parent has moved into the Adult with its bias and prejudice.



In situations such as this it is rather difficult, if not impossible, for the Adult to act in service of the Child. If this happens, the Child is not free to be creative, spontaneous, curious, or to most effectively employ language skills for self-expression.

It is important for the teacher to be aware of which ego state is likely to be in the executive when a learning experience is about to take place. We have tested some activities that demonstrate an approach useful for freeing Child ego states so that creative energies can be released and utilized. Students work in small groups and follow a sequence of steps provided on a task card. In each case directions and questions are ordered to challenge students' thinking, thus Adult ego states are also activated. Here is an example:

1. A. Tear out advertisements from magazines. Group the ads according to type of product, type of appeal, or any way that makes sense to you. Do certain kinds of products use certain techniques? Do some magazines carry more of one kind of ad than others? Pick two or three

different ads and think about what type of person each would appeal to most. Prepare to share your conclusions with the rest of the class.

The activity begins with data collecting, finding out what is. The next step requires organizing the material in some logical way. This is an aid to the following questions which are designed to help students discover relationships and make generalizations. Then they are directed to speculate on a certain kind of relationship: what kind of person would be attracted by a specific ad? Before the group shares their conclusions, we present them with a second task related to the first:

1. B. Write an ad for a book that you've enjoyed. Use techniques that will appeal to most of your classmates.

Now this group is challenged to employ techniques they've been examining and categorizing to compose an ad for a specific audience: their peers. After this, sharing takes place. If other groups are working on the same sequence, no two products will be alike.

It is also interesting to have different small groups all working on different tasks. Then, sharing would include as much about the process as about the product. Here are some additional ideas:

2. A. Go to the parking lot and write down the names of the cars there. (Or brainstorm names of cars.) Group the names in some logical way. What ideas about their cars are manufacturers trying to convey through their names? What are some features that people in the future will be looking for in cars? Think of some names of cars you might find in the parking lot in the year 2000. Prepare to share your ideas with the rest of the class.

2. B. Write a detailed description of the car you will be driving in the year 2000.

3. A. Take a survey of your fellow students to find out what kinds of stories, books, magazines they enjoy most. Organize your findings so that you can present a summary to the rest of the class. What type(s) of reading material has the greatest appeal to your classmates? Do you think the results would be different if you surveyed a group of teachers--a different group of students, perhaps older or younger than your class? Prepare to share your findings and thoughts on this subject.

3. B. Write a title and synopsis of a book that would appeal to most of your classmates, based on the information you gathered.

4. A. Look for patterns in one room of this building. Sketch the patterns you find. Are the patterns simply decorations or do they occur because of some functional value? Compare this room with a room in your home. In what ways are they alike or different? Do you find more of one kind of pattern in either place? Prepare to share your ideas with the rest of the class.

4. B. Write a detailed description of an ideal classroom--one that provides the best environment for learning.

5. A. Observe your classmates as they carry out their tasks. Record examples of what they have to say. Analyze the ways they are using language: to explain, to direct the actions of others, to ask for information, to express their feelings, etc. For what purposes are they using language most frequently? Do you think these same students' language patterns would be different in other situations? Prepare to share your conclusions with the rest of the class.

5. B. Select quotes from the speech samples you recorded. Put them together to make a script to be read later.

On many occasions we have seen students actively engaged in working through the steps outlined for them. Since these are group activities, no individual student needs to feel threatened. Interaction and sharing are encouraged in order to engage Child ego states. Yet the written directions provide guidance and lead students to explore, speculate, and draw conclusions; these steps require functioning Adult ego states.

Since the manner of response is open, every group's product is unique.

We have presented just one model for consideration. Creative teachers, whose Adult ego states serve their Child, will think of more ways to structure classroom activities that are not only productive but also enjoyable and in addition open students up for lifelong learning.

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